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COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

AMERICAN SAMOA

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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AMERICAN SAMOA 1/

I. GENERAL

1. American Samoa, a territory administered by the United States of America, is located in the South Pacific approximately 3,700 kilometres south-west of Hawaii and 4,350 kilometres north-east of Australia. It consists of six islands (Tutuila, Aunuu, Ofu, Olosega, Tau and Rose) belonging to the Samoan group. Swains Island, 340 kilometres north of Tutuila, is administered as an integral part of American Samoa. The total land area of the Territory is 197 square kilometres, about 70 per cent of which is covered by dense forest. Lying near the equator, between latitudes 13 and 16 south, American Samoa has a typical tropical climate with a wet and a dry season. Pago Pago, the capital, is located on Tutuila, the largest of the islands, where 90 per cent of the population lives.

2. Anyone born in American Samoa is a United States national and entitled to a modified United States passport. The only substantial legal difference between a citizen and a national is that the latter, as a non-citizen, cannot vote in United States elections.

II. CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

3. Information on constitutional and political developments in the Territory remained as reported in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 4-9).

III. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

A. General

4. The basic information on economic conditions in the Territory is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 10 and 11.).

B. Public service

5. The Government of American Samoa continued to be one of the largest employers in the Territory. Most of the employees in the public service were American Samoans. In view of its financial difficulties, the territorial administration periodically curtailed the working hours of government employees and considered other measures to downsize government services. However, the Governor of American Samoa stated that improving the delivery of government services was his highest priority. 2/

C. Land tenure and agriculture

6. Basic information on land tenure and agriculture is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 13-15).

7. The Territory spends more than $2 million for vegetable imports annually. The territorial Government has made plans for the development of a vegetable farming industry in the Territory, including construction of a small store at the Faratogo market to sell seeds, farming tools, chemicals and other items needed by the farmers. 3/ The territorial Government was also seeking federal assistance to continue funding research for taro leaf blight, 4/ a fungus disease that hit taro, a traditional farming crop, in 1993.

D. Industry

8. Information on American Samoa's tuna-processing industry is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 16-18).

9. Other industrial activities in American Samoa are mostly service-oriented. There are a number of small factories processing soap, perfume and alcohol. In August 1995, a California-based company, the Bao Chunt Textile Corporation, started construction of a garment factory at the Star Kist Can Plant at Tafuna, which may offer a potential employment opportunity for the local workforce. 5/

E. Transport and communications

10. Information on land and roads is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, para. 21). In July 1995, by an executive order of the Governor, the roads and highways divisions were transferred to the American Samoa Power Authority. The legality of this action was disputed by the Fono (Legislature). 6/

11. Information on sea links and shipping companies is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 22 and 23).

12. The Governor's proposed budget for 1996 earmarked $200,000 for the purpose of improving port operations and maintenance by creating a Port Master Plan and Port Authority. 7/

13. Information on American Samoa's air links is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, para. 24). A local air company, Samoa Air, is experiencing financial difficulties. As a result, one of its three aircraft on lease from the United States-based company, Pace Aviation, Ltd., was repossessed by the leasing company in May 1995. 8/

14. Information on radio, television and telephone links is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, para. 25).

The Office of Communications plans to introduce a new updated telephone system in the Territory. 9/ A new cable television company, American Samoa Cablevision, offers customers a 20-channel basic service. 10/

15. There are several weekly newspapers in the Territory in both the English and the Samoan languages. There is also a daily newspaper, the Samoa News.

F. Tourism

16. Information on the tourism industry is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, para. 27). According to experts, American Samoa has the potential to become an ecological tourism destination, but this potential is hindered by the lack of proper infrastructure, accommodation and service. 10/

G. Financial institutions

17. Information on financial institutions in the Territory is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 28 and 29).

H. Insurance

18. The Government of American Samoa has won a legal case in California against an insurance company that refused to satisfy fully a claim following hurricane "Val" in 1991. The Government was insured at the time with Affiliated FM Insurance for damages up to $45 million in the event of a hurricane. After "Val" hit American Samoa, Affiliated provided only two payments totalling $6.1 million. However, the Government claimed damages of more than $60 million which were disputed by the insurance company. A jury in California ordered Affiliated to pay the Government of American Samoa the maximum amount possible under the insurance policy. Affiliated is appealing the case. 11/

IV. SOCIAL CONDITIONS

A. Labour

19. Information on the labour force in the Territory is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 30 and 31). In 1993, the unemployment rate was 16.7 per cent. 12/

20. American Samoa is one of two United States Territories in which employers are allowed to pay workers less than the mainland minimum wage to ensure compatibility with the prevailing cost of living. In June 1995, the federal Special Industry Committee voted on the new pay schedule. Cannery workers will get an hourly increase from $3.05 to $3.10 on 1 July 1996. Hourly remuneration for public servants will increase in October 1996 to $2.45. Other categories of workers received an immediate increase which ranged from $0.05 to $0.30 an hour,

with another increase in July 1996 from $0.15 to $0.40 per hour over a two-year period. In its report, the Committee acknowledged the difficult state of the American Samoa economy, the competitive pressures on the canneries and the government's precarious financial situation. 13/

B. Immigration

21. Information on immigration is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 32 and 33).

C. Public health

22. The main hospital in the Territory, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Tropical Medical Center, continues to experience a shortage of qualified medical personnel and drugs. 14/ A total of $3 million is spent every year on pharmaceutical costs alone. 4/

23. The Territory continues to experience problems with drug use. In October 1995, the Government declared a "drug free Samoa week" to raise public awareness of the problem of drug abuse. The week was accompanied by various health-related projects. 15/

D. Crime and crime prevention

24. Information on crime and crime prevention is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, para. 36). A recent report by the United States Justice and Interior departments concluded that white collar crime and government fraud in American Samoa cost federal taxpayers millions of dollars, and contributed to the Territory's worsening financial situation. Local political figures criticized the reports as misinterpreting Samoan customs and values and undermining local efforts to eliminate corruption. 16/

E. Housing

25. Information on housing is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, para. 37).

V. EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONS

26. Information on educational conditions in the Territory is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 38 and 39).

VI. PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ARRANGEMENTS

27. Information on the Territory's participation in international organizations and arrangements is contained in the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023, paras. 40-43).

VII. FUTURE STATUS OF THE TERRITORY

28. On 6 December 1995, the General Assembly adopted by 146 votes to 4, with 3 abstentions, a consolidated resolution 50/38 B on 12 Non-Self-Governing Territories, section 1 of which was specifically devoted to American Samoa.

29. In explanation of vote before the voting, the representative of the United States said that in American Samoa, a majority of the Territory's voters and elected officials had seen no reason to change their current political status as an unorganized, unincorporated Territory of the United States. The United States Government made periodic inquiries through both the executive and legislative branches, offering to enter into discussions on political status or to hold a referendum. The message that the United States had received in response through the years had been consistent: the people of American Samoa were satisfied with their relationship with the United States and saw no reason to change it (A/50/PV.82).

Notes

1/ The present document is an update to the previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2023). The information contained in the present working paper was derived from published reports.

2/ American Samoa Journal and Advertiser, 13 September 1995.

3/ Ibid., 16 October 1995.

4/ Ibid., 12 July 1995.

5/ Ibid., 28 August 1995.

6/ Ibid., 10 July and 8 and 13 September 1995.

7/ Ibid., 7 June 1995.

8/ Ibid., 9 and 16 June 1995.

9/ Ibid., 11 August 1995.

10/ Ibid., 23 August 1995.

11/ South Pacific News Summary (Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations), 22 September 1995.

12/ American Samoa Journal and Advertiser, 27 September 1995.

13/ Ibid., 23 June 1995.

14/ Ibid., 2 October 1995.

15/ Ibid., 23 October 1995.

16/ Ibid., 4 and 7 August 1995.